

KIPLING, TWENTY YEARS AFTER

By A. W. YEATS

IN 1935, Rudyard Kipling from the vantage point of his sixty-ninth year was at work on his memoirs. Personally reticent and retiring, he found the role of autobiographical confessor a difficult one, and *Something of Myself* was as near as he could come to self-revelation. He had relentlessly driven the public in general and the newspaper reporter in particular from the domain of his private life, and now in his sunset years he found the habit of silence stronger than the urge to reveal. The manuscript of his memoirs was in little more than skeletal form, doubtless intended for further meditation and revision. Within a year he had died leaving the work unfinished, and his autobiography was published in its fragmentary state.

In it he gives intimate pictures of selected experiences with his emotional and intellectual response to them, but pivotal biographical details are largely ignored. We see glimpses of his mental processes, feel now and then the pulse of striking prose, but the book is disappointing. He could have said so much, but because of taciturn inclination or lack of time, these memoirs suggest an image, not a true portrait.

Perhaps none of Kipling's contemporaries, Sir Winston Churchill included, had his insight, the magnificent backgrounds of travel and of intimate contact with the major figures of his day to interpret the thought and the historical achievement of his generation. In young manhood Kipling enjoyed the rare privilege of challenging the interest of an empire. In his mature years he became spokesman for a vast segment of public opinion. In age it but remained for him to synthesize and appraise the Indian Summer of Victorianism to have become its interpretive voice.

The last two decades of his life, however, had drained away much of the zest for living, and his strength was not equal to the historian's task. Family difficulties, the enervating crisis of two wars, and a shift in literary taste made it increasingly difficult to maintain objectivity and spontaneity. The daily pain and paralyzing fear of cancer (diagnosed in his last years as duodenal ulcer) and the loss of two of his beloved children took their toll. He became tense in body and troubled in spirit. He was a courageous man who chose to bear grief and pain in silence and in private, but the world would have understood with greater charity had he been more articulate at the personal level.

Any biographer of Kipling sets for himself a formidable task and faces an array of unresolved problems. The elusive and sometimes quixotic personality of Kipling renders appraisal difficult. Vastly divergent estimates of his literary achievement attest the lack of definitive study. Also, the biographical materials are not readily accessible. Equally perplexing but of more significance to the present generation are four enigmas which rise like spectres out of the Kipling past.

1. Kipling sprang into the limelight of literary success so suddenly and so dominated popular taste for a decade that his meteoric appearance is always contrasted with a slow decline in literary power. This opinion demands careful re-evaluation and will in time be abandoned.

2. The aim of the Kipling Society has been to preserve and promote Kipling's reputation, but the public effect of this organization has been the inverse of its aspirations. Instead, the activities and publications of this organization have tended to associate Kipling's name with a political philosophy that has largely been out of favour since the inception of the Society in 1927. Rather than giving strength to Kipling's literary reputation, the organization has taken strength from it by presenting him as the high priest of Imperialistic, Tory Conservatism. No man of letters is strengthened in his art by a political tag. It is significant that the collegiate and young adult mind, once the strongest segment of Kipling support, now refuses to read any author with the onus of "Tory Imperialist" attached. Are there no universal values or humanitarian appeal in his works for the Kipling Society to discover?

3. With the exception of three very able French authors, every literary critic from the 'eighties' to the present, when attempting a review of the Kipling accomplishment, has fallen into the error of attempting a definitive treatment of the Kipling literary rank rather than concerning himself with Kipling's art. Each has attempted to drive the precise little golden (and/or brass) nail upon which the Kipling reputation should hang. In a generation still divided by individualistic and socialistic factions, by paternalism and Anglophobia, and by political ideologies that attempt to impose their concepts upon the forms of art, no definitive assessment of Kipling's ultimate rank can be expected now.

4. Kipling's financial success has detracted from his literary reputation. The charge has strangely persisted that he was a jingoist who was oblivious to the canons of art and who wrote solely for financial advantage. English authors of merit

are, by tradition, supposed to die of starvation in some garret shortly after producing their masterpieces. Both Kipling and George Bernard Shaw disturbed this neat fiction but by no means annihilated it. Such effusions as *The Absent Minded Beggar*, while a generous gesture for war relief and admitted by Kipling as "scurrilous verse", was sold by the yard, by the copy, and almost by the chorus. Still, it and others like it did Kipling's reputation harm. His financial independence precluded the necessity of poor or inartistic work. His wealth, however, did not suppress an adolescent-like exuberance, which seemed to have been a permanent aspect of his personality.

Literature, none-the-less, was for Kipling serious business. Among literary people it has been known since the middle 1930's that Kipling was offered the Laureateship in 1895 by Lord Salisbury and that he was offered repeated honours, among them the distinction of knighthood and the Order of Merit. The King suggested that Kipling name the honour that he would be willing to receive. He refused them all. His position was that he "could not write to order" and that he wished to be free to produce the best that was in him. The world may question his art, but his integrity commands universal respect. He accepted only academic honours and literary recognition in the form of honorary doctorates, the Nobel Prize for Literature, and the gold medal award from the Royal Society of Literature. Kipling's devotion to his calling was one of the sacred motivating forces of his life. Even T. S. Eliot fails to take the measure of the man he has anthologized. Eliot's verdict that Kipling never intended to write "poetry" but was content to write "great verse" is both glib and undiscerning.

Kipling was buried in the Abbey in 1936; now, after a lapse of twenty years, his life story has again been taken up and told more revealingly than he could have, or in modesty, would have told it.* The author, Mr. Charles E. Carrington, is Professor of Commonwealth Relations at the Royal Institute of International Affairs. The Carrington approach of attempting to understand the complex personality of Kipling through his work is, in the opinion of this writer, the only valid approach with the limited materials now at hand. His access to the Kipling family papers (diaries, scrapbooks, the more important "in" letters, and the carefully preserved file copies of all "out" letters) adds great validity to his study. He enjoys the additional advantage of friendship with the Kipling family. Mrs. George

**Rudyard Kipling, His Life and Work*. By Charles E. Carrington. Macmillan, London.

Bambridge, Kipling's daughter, has contributed much in the way of factual materials and has reviewed the Carrington interpretations and conclusions.

Professor Carrington, through his own wide travels and reading backgrounds, has made understandable both the historical and geographical settings requisite to a review of Kipling's works. Herein he has done appreciable service to his readers. Much of the Kipling background demands explanation, and in matters of source and inspiration, Mr. Carrington's study is by far the most informative work yet to appear in print. His observations frequently are shrewd literary analyses, and future critical study will confirm most of his preliminary work. He has read his author carefully and what is more, he seems to be the first important critic who has read the entire corpus of the Kipling writings. Kipling's first book was printed in 1881, his last in 1937. Any generalization which fails to take into account both his unusually long span of authorship and the successive phases of his interests is in danger of error. Much of the critical estimate of the past, both adulatory and derogative, shows the fault of opinionated bias supported by too little reading or too selective reading from his works. Fortunately, Mr. Carrington's book has the advantage of breadth and penetration.

He has recaptured the mood of the writer, the aura of the locale, and recounted the precipitating stimulus of so many of the Kipling works. One never knows what the major impact of a book will prove, but the final merit of the Carrington study is likely to be its proof of the extensive autobiographical element in the Kipling writings. Critical comment of the past has rhapsodized on Kipling's originality in handling the Indian scene and Indian materials. Actually, he was taking family incident, a tale narrated by his father, or an autobiographical incident and giving it Indian characters and Indian setting. The source of the rest of his tales is largely literary in origin. He consciously borrowed plots from his wide reading in English and French literature and gave them Indian atmosphere. The *Jungle Books* have their origins not in the wilds of India but in the jungles of the library and in the daily incident of family life.

Mr. Carrington has not presented much startlingly new biographical interpretation of his subject, but he has painstakingly filled in the detail needed to make the portrait suggested in *Something of Myself* a life record of a human being. While he ignores the faulty biographical accounts of the past, he makes honest effort to synthesize the more valid accounts and sub-

stantiate them out of the family correspondence. He has little or nothing to say about the critical estimate with which he disagrees, and the vast amount of new material is told in straightforward, readable prose.

The Carrington discussion of the Macdonald and the Kipling family backgrounds is of prime importance because this is the first serious attempt to treat these Kipling materials from the family point of view. While brief, the handling seems adequate. The study of the very young Kipling in the "House of Desolation" makes some presumption upon the reader's knowledge of Rudyard and his sister's neglect when they were separated from their parents and sent to England to school, but the period is handled with appreciable insight. Kipling's later school days at "Westward Ho!" are touched upon and some new material is introduced, but Professor Carrington was careful not to review in detail the work already covered by G. C. Beresford and L. C. Dunsterville in their autobiographical accounts. The careful and penetrating study of Kipling in India as a young journalist is perhaps the most rewarding part of the book. The influence of the family (which he had not known before), the life at the club, and the challenge of creative work were the formative forces which produced the developed man.

The book makes honest attempt to appraise the impact of the "home English" upon the young adult Kipling when he began residence in London in 1889. A still further interpretive study is attempted in assessing the influence of the Balestier family as a group upon young Rudyard and of Caroline Balestier in particular, whom he later married. The American interlude, including the residence at Brattleboro, Vermont, and its unhappy associations with Beatty Balestier, is narrated with frank and honest appraisal. The subsequent Kipling residences at The Elms in Rottingdean, The Woolsack in South Africa, and at Bateman's in Sussex are treated with usual reporterage. The last third of the book, however, abandons all effort at interpretation, treats very little biography, and concerns itself with Kipling's writings, his political activities, and some of his reaction to contemporary events.

Rudyard Kipling under the Carrington handling is much more understandable as a man, even though the book shows more of the man already known to the public than the man presented from fireside study. Kipling's life as a family man will likely never be written. Although the present work is styled as "definitive", the really definitive life of Kipling will never come to light until the ample storehouses of his private corres-

pendence are brought together through microfilm or photostat and Kipling is allowed to tell his own life record through correspondence with his friends.

The limitations of the Carrington study are, in the main, pardonable and understandable. Especially disappointing is the fact that there is no attempt to make the Kipling at Bateman's a more vital figure. The latter portion of the book almost neglects biography and certainly avoids the obligation of interpretive study. The author did not have before him some of the complex American printings of Kipling's works, and in some instances his comments about them need emendation. An irritating mechanical fault in the American edition is that references to source materials are frequently confusing and sometimes lacking altogether. Footnote numbers are listed for which no corresponding data appears. The objectivity and restraint with which the book begins are maintained reasonably well until the closing chapters, which are too adulatory to sustain so fine a beginning.

The Epilogue by Mrs. Bambridge is a fortunate addition to this Kipling study. Her remarks are both valuable and informative. Apart from the interest of her narrative, her words lend a note of approval and authority to Mr. Carrington's work and, in themselves, re-create something of the charm and fascination of the Kipling name.

The Carrington contribution has been that of analyzing the life and work of a man against the background of his age, which, in final analysis, is the purpose of biography. His interest has been two-fold, that of studying both the man and the accomplishment of his creative genius, hence the title *Rudyard Kipling, His Life and Work*. The American title of the Doubleday edition, *The Life of Rudyard Kipling*, is much less apt. The English printing by Macmillan is superior on several counts—appearance, quality of paper, typography, and general format.